

After swallowing the prey, it slowly climbed up a *Ricinus communis* tree and settled itself on a twig and remained motionless till 1530 h. A garden lizard feeding on a snake is unusual, hence worthy of placing on record.

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16. PYTHON PREYING ON RAT SNAKE

It was raining in Panna National Park, Madhya Pradesh, during late June, 1998. One day, while I was sampling for bear scats down a road, a forest guard I met on the way informed me that a python had been found lying about 100 m off the road. Eager to break the monotony of sampling for scats, I went about looking for it. It was close to the *Kheriah* grassland along a stream bordered with a few riparian trees. I found this young python lying in a small pool of water, holding on to a rat snake effortlessly, biting the mid-body and smothering it. The rat snake helplessly tried to get out of the stranglehold. The python was about 2.1 m long, and the rat snake was a full grown one of about 1.8 m long, but only one-fifth or one-sixth as thick as the python. I watched them for about 15 minutes and left the place so as not to disturb them any longer. I assume that the python must have eaten the rat

snake after killing it.

Though seeing a python, particularly during the rainy season, is not unusual in Panna, I was surprised to see it preying on a rat snake. I have not come across reports of python feeding on other snakes. Whitaker (1978) reports mammals and birds as the major food of python, and Daniel (1983) adds monitor lizard and various frogs to its reported prey. Bhupathy and Vijayan (1989) report the various mammal and bird food items eaten by python in Bharatpur, but they have not, in their two year study, recorded python preying on another snake.

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17. ABERRANT BANDED RACERS *ARGYROGENA FASCIOLATUS*

(With two plates)

In January 1998, the second author found a snake in Ghorawadi, near Talegaon, Pune dist.,

Maharashtra. It had nine supralabials on each side and 97 paired subcaudals. Barring these two

discrepancies, the snake fits Smith's (1943) description of *Argyrogena fasciolatus* well.

Table 1 provides important details on measurements and scalation of the snake. Additional information is presented below (see also Fig. 1 and 2). Snout strongly projecting; head feebly distinct from neck; rostral large, broader than high; suture between internasals shorter than that between prefrontals; pupil round. Body pale brown above, marked anteriorly with narrow cross bars formed by a pattern of white and dark brown marks; posteriorly, the bars become indistinct and finally disappear towards the tail which is a uniform pale brown above; ventrum uniform enamel white. Head above marbled with light and dark brown; a white spot on the midline of each frontoparietal suture, another on the middle of the interparietal suture. We were unable to sex the snake. The specimen has been deposited at the Bombay Natural History Society (Specimen no. 3175).

Smith (1943) lists eight supralabials as a key character for *A. fasciolatus*, while the number of subcaudals recorded by him are 77-92. Specimens from Pakistan also have eight supralabials (Minton 1966). Though ventral and subcaudal abnormalities have been reported in this species (Gharpurey 1931), we are unaware of any supralabial variation on record.

The two aberrations exhibited by the Ghorawadi individual might seem insignificant by themselves, but together they cause Smith's (1943) key to the species of *Coluber* sensu lato to fail. Using the key alone, without referring to descriptions of each species of *Coluber*, one would wrongly assign this individual to *Coluber ravergieri*.

Before assigning this snake to *Argyrogena fasciolatus*, descriptions and pholidosis of all the species of the *Coluber* complex (sensu Smith 1943) that are known to occur in India were studied (*Coluber*, *Spalerosophis* and *Argyrogena*). Photographs of the head shields of the aberrant snake, as well as its scale counts were compared with four previously identified *A. fasciolatus*

TABLE I
DATA ON MEASUREMENTS (IN MM) AND
SCALATION OF *ARGYROGENA FASCIOLATUS*
(SHAW 1802) FROM MAHARASHTRA, INDIA

Features	
Scales (smooth)	21:23:17
Ventrals (obtusely angulate laterally)	217
Anals	2
Subcaudals (paired + one caudal spur)	97
Supralabials (scales contacting orbit in brackets)	9 (5,6)
Infralabials	11
Loreal (longer than tall)	1
Preocular (touches top of head)	1
Presubocular (arguably a divided 4th supralabial)	1
Postoculars	2
Temporals	2 + 3
Snout - vent length	500
Tail length	140

specimens in the collection of the Bombay Natural History Society. In addition, two specimens of *Coluber ravergieri* were also examined. Finally, the aberrant individual was compared with 12 live *A. fasciolatus*. Five of these were from Pune dist., 7 from around Aurangabad.

Two of the live snakes from Aurangabad had varying supralabials. One of them had L8 (4,5), R7 (3,4); the other had L9 (5,6), R8 (4,5) supralabials (L - left, R - right, scales contacting orbit in brackets). This lends further credence to the fact that the Ghorawadi individual was indeed an aberrant *Argyrogena fasciolatus* and not a wrongly identified snake.

To conclude, we quote Frank Wall (1907) "..... many people appear to expect a key to direct them unerringly in every case to the object of their enquiry, but the disciple of Darwin, on a little reflection, must see how impossible it is to fulfil such expectations, for it is only through variation that the evolution doctrine can be accepted. Whether the variation is retrograde — a reversion to an ancestral type, or progressive — a deviation towards a new type, the effect is the same, and certain individuals must occur which depart in some way or other from the accepted normal type. This being so, any key, however well constructed, will fail to correctly

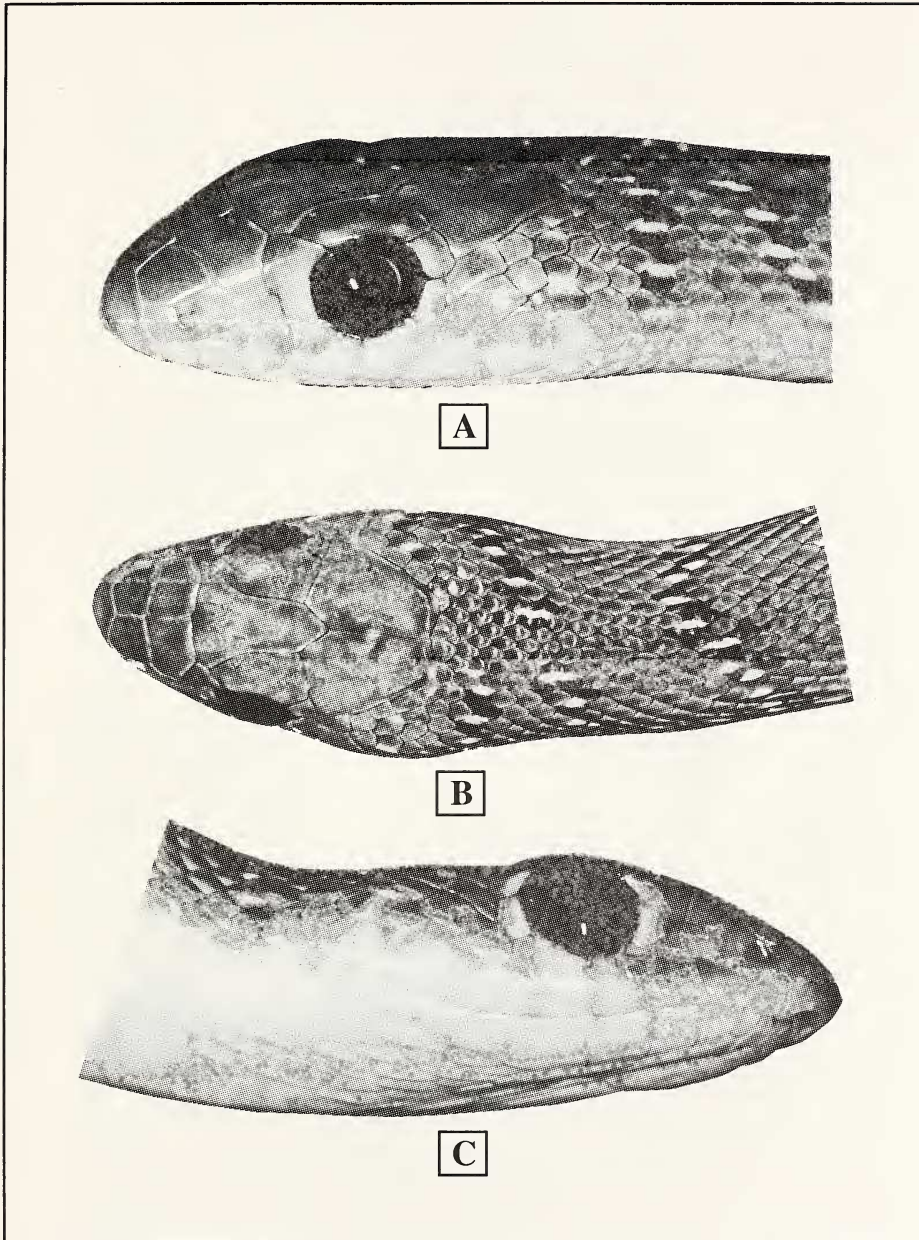


Fig. 1: *Argyrogena fasciolatus* (Shaw 1802). Live aberrant snake from Maharashtra, India.
A. and C. Lateral views of head showing 9 supralabials; B. Dorsal view of head.

Ashok Captain & Sanjay Thakur: *Argyrogena fasciolatus*

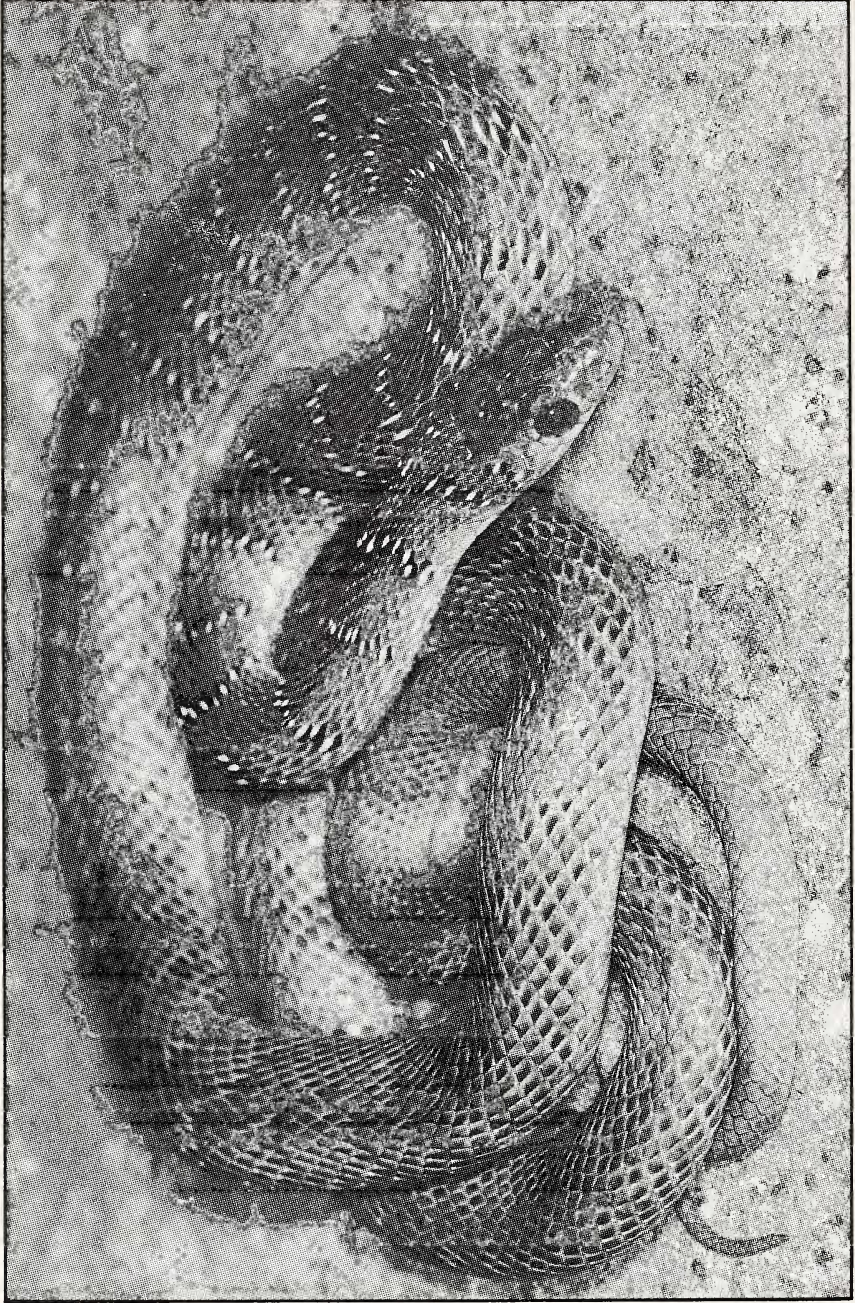


Fig. 2: *Argyrogena fasciolatus* (Shaw, 1802). Live aberrant snake from Maharashtra, India. Dorsal view of body

indicate certain individual specimens. In framing keys, one endeavours to select characters which are found to be most stable in individuals of the same species, so as to minimise the chances of misleading."

Only time will tell whether the Ghorawadi variation is retrograde or progressive.

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18. *BUFO VIRIDIS* IN JAIPUR DISTRICT, RAJASTHAN

(With one plate)

During the rainy season, in July 1995, a large number of newly hatched larvae were collected from a temporary pool and juvenile toads were collected from the grass near the pool and from nearby fields, in sand, crevices, and under pebbles from various localities in Jaipur dist., Rajasthan. It was identified at BNHS as *Bufo viridis*, which has been reported earlier from Jammu & Kashmir, north and west of Punjab and Gujarat and now for the first time from Jaipur (Rajasthan).

Bufo viridis, a handsome toad, commonly known as the green toad, grows to a length of 73.5 mm to 98 mm (head to vent). Snout pointed and black, eyes prominent, tympanum distinct.

First finger longer than the second, toes about 2/3 webbed, heels do not meet when the legs are folded at right angles to the body, two shovel-shaped metatarsal tubercles are present. Skin slightly loose laterally, an inverted V-shaped

glandular ridge present between the shoulders, a row of white tubercles present along the outer aspect of the forearm and hind limbs, ventrally the skin is glandular.

Body grey, with dark green marbling with reddish centres. Lips, limbs (fore and hind) and toes are barred. Colour of the ventrum white, but throat and chest stippled with brown.

A burrowing species, it is rarely seen above ground except during the breeding season. These toads are excellent burrowers in loose soil, using their powerful metatarsal tubercles to burrow quickly and disappear underground. While burrowing, the soil is dislodged by sideways movements of the legs, and the animal subsides into the ground; the eyes disappear last, leaving no trace above of its presence. The toads move with slow hops and are very feeble swimmers. They can climb well, doing so over grass in a curious manner, with the help of the pads present